

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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SUBJ: FOREIGN MINISTER COMMENTS ON PANAMA MEETING

1. IN A BRIEF CONVERSATION FONMIN LIEVANO COMMENTED ON THE RECENT DECLARATION OF PANAMA AND THE SITUATION THERE AS FOLLOWS:

2. THOMSON-URRUTIA TREATY. LIEVANO TOOK PAINS TO EXPLAIN (AS HAD PRESIDENT LOPEZ IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE IN PANAMA, BOGOTA 2759) JUST WHAT IT WAS COLOMBIA DID. HE EMPHASIZED THAT COLOMBIA HAD NOT DENOUNCED THE THOMSON-URRUTIA TREATY OR ITS PRIVILEGES UNDER IT; WHAT IT DID WAS OBTAIN PANAMANIAN AGREEMENT TO EXTEND THE SAME PRIVILEGES AT SUCH TIME AS IT WAS IN A POSITION TO DO SO. THE "RENOUNCING" MEANT ONLY NO LONGER CLAIMING A PRIVILEGE FROM THE US WHEN THE US WAS NO LONGER IN A POSITION TO COMPLY. THIS WAS HENCE AN ALMOST OBVIOUS MOVE. THUS, THE MIN EMPHASIZED, THE OPERATIVE CONDITION IS A CIRCUMSTANCE IN WHICH THE US NO LONGER HAS THE JURISDICTIONAL OR OPERATIONAL CONTROL OF THE CANAL. HE NOTED THAT THE DECLARATION OF PANAMA SPECIFIED TWO PRECONDITIONS-- THE CONCLUSION OF A NEW TREATY BETWEEN PANAMA AND THE US AND THE CONCLUSION OF A TREATY BETWEEN PANAMA AND COLOMBIA SPELLING OUT THE PRIVILEGES. HE OBSERVED THAT IF A NEW TREATY BETWEEN THE US AND PANAMA PROVIDED FOR A PERIOD OF US OPERATION OF THE CANAL, COLOMBIA WOULD EXPECT THE USG TO ABIDE BY THE THOMSON-URRUTIA TREATY; IF JOINT ADMINISTRATION WERE CALLED FOR, THE

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GOC WOULD EXPECT THAT THE US AND PANAMA WOULD WORK INTO THEIR

ARRANGEMENT THE MUTUALLY AGREED UPON PRIVILEGES EXTENDED TO COLOMBIA--BY THE THOMSON-URRUTIA TREATY IN THE CASE OF THE USG AND BY THE DECLARATION OF PANAMA IN THE CASE OF PANAMA.

3. LIEVANO ALSO COMMENTED THAT THE GOC REALLY FELT IT HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION OF ITS PRIVILEGES WITH PANAMA SINCE IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE US COULD NOT GUARANTEE BY ITSELF THAT PANAMA WOULD ACCEPT COLOMBIA'S TREATY RIGHTS. RECOGNIZING THAT THE USG WOULD ABIDE BY ITS TREATY OBLIGATIONS THE GOC NEVERTHELESS HAD TO DEAL WITH PANAMA TO ASSURE THAT THAT NATION WOULD AGREE TO THE CONTINUANCE OF THE SPECIAL TREATMENT WHEN IT GAINED JURISDICTION AND SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE CANAL. (A RELIABLE SOURCE QUOTED PRESIDENT LOPEZ AS SAYING PRIVATELY UPON HIS RETURN THAT COLOMBIA DEALT WITH PANAMA ON THIS ISSUE BECAUSE THE US HAD TOLD THE GOC THAT IT COULD DO NOTHING ABOUT GUARANTEEING THE CONTINUATION OF ITS PRIVILEGES; THAT IS SIMILAR TO WHAT PRESIDENT LOPEZ TOLD AMB MAILLIARD, BOGOTA 802).

4. PANAMA NEGOTIATIONS. SPEAKING ON THE SITUATION IN GENERAL, LIEVANO TERMED THE SITUATION IN PANAMA WITH REGARD TO THE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS AS EXPLOSIVE. IF THERE WERE ANY EXTENDED DELAY IN CONCLUDING A NEW TREATY, OR IF THE US SENATE REJECTED IT, HE SAID, VIOLENCE WOULD BE INEVITABLE. SHOULD THAT OCCUR, THE THIRD WORLD GENERALLY WOULD SUPPORT PANAMA, AND THE SITUATION WOULD BE ONE OF THE UTMOST SERIOUSNESS AND DELICACY. THE MINISTER CALLED PANAMA THE "PALESTINE OF LATIN AMERICA". HE HOPED THE US UNDERSTOOD THE DELICACY OF THE SITUATION AND HOW FAR THINGS HAVE GONE IN THE PANAMANIAN PSYCHOLOGY. HE ADDED THAT TORRIJOS COMPREHENDED THE PROBLEMS IN BOTH THE US AND PANAMA AND UNDERSTOOD THAT THE US CANNOT BE PUSHED TOO FAR, AND THEREFORE IT WOULD BE GREAT ERROR IF THE US DID NOT COME TO AN AGREEMENT WITH HIM. NO SUCCESSOR WOULD BE BETTER; HE WOULD BE EITHER MORE RADICAL OR, IF HE WERE LESS SO, UNABLE TO HOLD THE SITUATION DOMESTICALLY.
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